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## Building Beyond The Mediterranean Studying The Archives of European Businesses (1860-1970)

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# The historical archives of the Cavalieri del Lavoro

*Les archives historiques des Cavalieri del Lavoro*

**Michelangelo Salpietro**

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# The historical archives of the Cavalieri del Lavoro

Michelangelo Salpietro

Raising the Aswan Dam (c. 1930),  
Historical Archives of the Cavalieri del  
Lavoro, Rome, dossier Guido R. Pizzagalli

The Cavalieri del Lavoro is an Italian order of merit. In Rome, the archive, known as the Archivio Storico dei Cavalieri del Lavoro (ASCL, Historical Archives of the Knights of Labor) contains exhaustive and continuous documentation on 110 years of Italian industry. There are 2,702 files, of which 2,134 are stored in the so-called “historical” archives, defined as those concerning the deceased Cavalieri del Lavoro, and 568 in the “current” archives, concerning the living Cavalieri del Lavoro. The “historical” archives are collected in 209 cartons labeled with Roman numerals (I-CCIX). The “current” archives, reside in 80 cartons labeled with Arabic numerals (1-80).

The distinction between “historical” and “current” is chiefly for the convenience of the researcher. In fact, the files systematically present each Knight’s biographical information and the reasons for his nomination to the order.

The archives are particularly valuable, because for the majority of the entrepreneurs awarded the Order of Merit for Labor from 1902 to 1943, the only documentary material extant is that preserved at the ASCL.

Since its founding in 1926, the ASCL’s purpose has been to collect and store information on the life and works of the Cavalieri del Lavoro. The files contain valuable information not only on business activities, but also on social initiatives. They were systematically used as sources in 2001 for the publication of a book celebrating the centenary of the Order of Merit for Labor. Although they represent a first-hand source for the study of the history of economy, industry and entrepreneurship, they are largely unexplored.

The recent reorganization of the ASCL was carried out in conformity with the provisions concerning the organization of the archives. This effort was rewarded in June 2011 when the archives were declared to be “of particularly important historical interest”. Thanks to this legal recognition, the ASCL is now listed as one of Italy’s “national cultural assets”, guaranteeing it the protection provided by the State in safeguarding cultural heritage.

Since June 2011, as a result of a computerization project started in 2009, an inventory of the records and a concise

inventory of all files have been available online. The database is organized on the basis of open information infrastructures – that is, uniform, recurrent information elements liable to be systematically analyzed in order to facilitate the selective recovering and processing of data, allowing for reference aggregation and typological processing operations. The aim is to make the ASCL’s documentation available to scholars and Knights’ families, providing users with a free-access platform with a multi-level aggregation and decomposition structure to broaden the query and statement capabilities.

